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ABSTRACT

An evaluation is provided of two aspects of Monroe County Community College's (MCCC's) writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) program: a Writing Center and peer tutoring by instructor-nominated Writing Fellows. Introductory remarks in Part 1 highlight the benefits of the college's programs for faculty, Writing Fellows, the college administration, and students. Part 2 provides background on the Writing Center and the frequency of its use, indicating that more than half of the increased usage of MCCC's Learning Assistance Center could be attributed to the newly instituted Writing Center. Part 3 contains an evaluation of the Writing Fellows program based on survey responses from students who had worked with the tutors. Highlighted findings indicate that 76% of the students felt that the Writing Fellows' comments on their rough drafts and conferences with the Writing Fellows were helpful or very helpful. Positive and negative responses to open-ended questions are included. Part 4 summarizes the survey responses of 14 of the 15 faculty members who used the services of the Writing Fellows in winter 1989. All but one of the instructors indicated that they would be willing to work with Writing Fellows again, and 11 felt that the papers they received that term were better than papers submitted by classes without tutors. Part 5 contains the evaluations of the program by the 25 Writing Fellows. Survey findings revealed that the Writing Fellows read and commented upon the first drafts of 49 papers, they spent 2 hours a week in the Writing Center, they each worked with between 10 and 15 students, and they all felt that their own writing had improved as a result of their work. A chronology of the WAC program from winter 1986 to June 1989 is attached. (JMC)

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MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

ANNUAL REPORT 1988-89

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Compiled and Written

by

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Submitted: 14 July 1989

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MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WAC ANNUAL REPORT 1988-89

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introductory Remarks	PAGES 1-3
	ANNUAL SURVEY REPORT	
II.	Writing Center in the Learning Assistance Lab / Frequency Data	PAGE 4
III.	Evaluation of the Program by Students Who Worked with Writing Fellows	PAGES 5-10
IV.	Evaluation of the Program by Faculty Who Used Writing Fellows	PAGES 10-15
V.	Evaluation of the Program by Writing Fellows	PAGES 15-18
	ARCHIVAL MATERIALS	
VI.	A History of WAC at MCCC	PAGES 19-24

"Faculty always complain that the academic skills of undergraduates are declining. Their lamentations are as much a part of campus tradition as homecoming and spring break. Since the late '60s, however, their complaints have taken on a new urgency, particularly with respect to student writing. Surveys confirm that large numbers of entering students lack the ability to express their thoughts clearly. . . ."

(The Student Writer: An Endangered Species? Editor, Albert Benderson. Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1989.)

The following report documents the progress of one of Monroe County Community College's efforts to improve student writing and learning. This report traces the MCCC Writing-across-the-Curriculum Program from its inception in the spring of 1986 through the spring of 1989.

I believe it is a thorough, accurate, and honest record of our program to date. I hope this is the first of many annual reports that will trace the progress of our Writing Center, Writing Fellows, and Writing-to-Learn activities.

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We have made a good start. We have the support of the faculty, the administration, and the students. Several faculty members have said that "this is the best thing the college has ever done."

That is high praise. Our ambitions are not nearly so grand. As you will see from our mission statement included on page twenty-six of the comprehensive edition of this report: "We are willing to accept small successes, and we will try not to expect too much. We are not miracle workers; we recognize our limitations. . . . Improvement, not perfection, is our goal."

We are not where we hope to be in another year or two. We will do more to publicize the program and to make faculty and students aware of what they can expect from Writing Fellows and a Writing Center.

The role of Writing Fellows on this campus is just beginning to be felt. But it is being felt, even after one semester. This summer ('89), when I had students in my 151 Logic class write a paper, several asked if we would have Writing Fellows available--as they had been for the winter class. Alas, Writing Fellows are not yet budgeted for the summer session. I have also had several of our top students inquire about becoming Writing Fellows next year. One excellent student indicated that she plans to transfer at the end of the fall term, but she will stay an extra semester if she is allowed to serve as a Writing Fellow during the 1990 winter term.

WHY THE WRITING FELLOWS/WRITING CENTER APPROACH?

Monroe County Community College has a program that works because it benefits everyone involved. Pragmatically speaking, the success or failure of many innovative programs depends on how satisfactorily we can answer one question: "What's in it for me?" This program has something for everyone who asks that question: 1) Faculty, 2) Writing Fellows, 3) Administration, and 4) Students.

1) Faculty members are pleased to know that they are receiving papers that have been through at least two drafts. They do not have to read something thrown together the night before it is due. They are pleased because this approach does not ask more of them. To those who use writing or would like to use more writing in their courses, we are simply saying: "Let us help you use it more effectively. You may not have time to teach the writing process, but your students probably need some guidance. A Writing Fellow can provide some of that guidance for you."

2) The Writing Fellows benefit in a number of ways. Their own writing improves as they become more proficient at analyzing the work of others. At the same time, they have earned an academic credential they can use when applying to other schools and when applying for work. In addition, they are placed in a position of honor in the academic community--a powerful motivation for some. When evaluating her first semester as a Writing Fellow, one student wrote: "I was overjoyed when I opened the letter from MCCC that told me a faculty member had nominated me for this fellowship. I shared my news with everyone I knew. I will keep that letter with other important papers probably forever. My views have never dimmed when it comes to this honored position."

3) The college administration benefits. Every year studies tell us that students around the country need help with their writing. My survey of our own faculty (spring 1987) showed that 80% of our faculty feel that a significant percentage of our students are seriously handicapped by deficient writing skills. This is a cost-effective way to attack that problem. It costs less than a half-time teaching position, yet it works one-on-one with several hundred students as they write in a wide variety of courses across the curriculum.

4) Students have quickly seen the advantages of working with a Writing Fellow. Writing Centers are good, but our Writing Fellows' approach is even better. Writing Centers often have trouble recruiting the students who need help the most. Many students are not convinced they need help with a paper until the paper has been graded. At that point, the student sees our offer to help as a case of "too little, too late."

Recruiting students for the Writing Center is not a big problem at MCCC because our Writing Fellows work with our teachers. Students will receive guidance with the writing process because it is a course requirement. First drafts must be reviewed by the Writing Fellow. Most students, once they have been required to work through the process with their Writing Fellow, can see the benefits of this approach. They know they benefit when their paper receives a personal response and valuable feedback at the point in the process when it really matters: before the paper is due and before the grade has been determined.

We must not underestimate the value of the personal response Writing Fellows provide. Students attending a two-year college often find the campus impersonal. Many have few opportunities for interpersonal communication with other students. Our students often rush from job, to class, to family responsibilities. College can become little more than a place to take notes and to take tests.

Before attending graduate school, I taught full time in an elementary school. I was there long enough to appreciate the close personal relationships that can form when a teacher works with the same students several hours a day, five days a week. That closeness is often missing in the community college setting. All of my students commute, and I seldom see them more than three hours a week.

Having worked alongside our Writing Fellows for a semester, I now know that Writing Fellows and a Writing Center can change the community college experience. The change may be small, but it is absolutely a change for the better. When two people sit down and brainstorm ideas for a paper or analyze the progress of a first draft, a very personal and important kind of communication is taking place--something that can occur in a classroom, but it seldom does.

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Since this is our first annual report on WAC at MCCC, I have tried to make the comprehensive edition very thorough. I have included a history of the program, and I have included many of the materials we used to get the program started. Future reports will be shorter since they will only report the results of that year's activities.

MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WINTER 1989
WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM SURVEY

PART ONE: WRITING CENTER IN THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE LAB FREQUENCY USE DATA

The Writing Center had a significant impact on activity in the LAL during the winter 1989 semester.

A year ago (1988), before the Writing Center was added, the LAL kept no statistics related to writing or the tutoring of writing. In the category most likely to be related to writing, English, the LAL recorded 61 tutoring sessions in the winter 1988 semester.

During the winter semester of 1989, when the Writing Center and the Writing Fellows were added to the LAL for the first time, the LAL recorded 58 tutoring sessions in the category of English and 485 in the new category: Writing Center.

Total use of the LAL in all categories included 1,414 sessions in the winter of 1988. The total use of the LAL during the winter of 1989 jumped to 2,359 sessions--a significant increase of 945 sessions, up 67% from the previous year.

Although more than half of the LAL's increased usage is directly attributable to the Writing Center, we must acknowledge that long before the Writing Center was organized, the LAL had become a vital part of MCCC. Many of our best students depend on it and use it almost daily.

Nevertheless, the Writing Center will almost certainly have a positive influence on LAL usage. Students in courses which use Writing Fellows will often meet with their Writing Fellow in the LAL, and when they do this, they discover first hand how much they can benefit from the LAL's services. Some of these students will return for help in other courses.

We should also note that even though the LAL recorded 485 tutoring sessions in the Writing Center in the LAL, this is not the total number of tutoring sessions in which the Writing Fellows were involved. Not all Writing Fellow tutoring sessions took place in the LAL. Students in classes at the south county campus worked together at the south county campus. For a variety of reasons, students and Writing Fellows had tutoring sessions whenever and wherever they could find a convenient place to meet: in the library, the cafeteria, and on the phone when all else failed.

PART TWO: EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM BY STUDENTS WHO WORKED WITH WRITING FELLOWS

During the winter semester 1989, twenty-one MCCC classes in a variety of disciplines had Writing Fellows assigned to assist their fellow students with all major writing assignments. At the end of the semester, students in eighteen of those classes completed a survey designed to evaluate their experiences with the Writing Fellows. (Three classes did not find time to administer the survey during the busy final week of class.)

The results are listed below. (Evaluations were completed by 254 students. Although not all students enrolled in the courses were in class on the days the evaluations were distributed, and some students did not answer all questions on the survey, this is a very large and representative sample of those who worked with Writing Fellows during the winter 1989 term.)

1) How helpful were the written comments on your paper?

An encouraging total: 76% of the students in these classes felt the written comments the Writing Fellows attached to the rough drafts of their papers were helpful or very helpful.

35%	Very Helpful	(88 of 254)
41%	Helpful	(103 of 254)
21%	Marginally Helpful	(53 of 254)
3%	Not Helpful	(8 of 254)

2) How helpful were your conferences with Writing Fellows?
(A few were unable to arrange conferences and had to rely on written comments.)

Although the numbers are slightly different in each category, once again 76% of the students who could arrange conferences with their Writing Fellows felt the conferences were helpful or very helpful.

31%	Very Helpful	(71 of 227)
46%	Helpful	(105 of 227)
20%	Marginally Helpful	(45 of 227)
6%	Not Helpful	(6 of 227)

3) Check your overall rating of the Writing Fellows with whom you worked.

Of the students in classes with Writing Fellows assigned, 79% said they found the people they worked with to be effective or very effective.

31%	Very Effective	(78 of 251)
48%	Effective	(120 of 251)
17%	Marginally Useful	(43 of 251)
4%	Unsatisfactory	(10 of 251)

4) Check your overall rating of the Writing Fellows Program (the Writing Center and the Writing Fellows in general).

As we might expect, the response to this question is about the same as that above: 78% feel the Writing Fellows Program is effective or very effective.

28%	Very Effective	(71 of 251)
50%	Effective	(125 of 251)
17%	Marginally Useful	(43 of 251)
5%	Unsatisfactory	(12 of 251)

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Although we will not be completely satisfied until everyone involved with the program finds it helpful, the results of this first semester are encouraging. Fewer than 5 percent of those involved found the service unsatisfactory. Since most of these classes required students to submit rough drafts and attend conferences with their Writing Fellows, we are pleased to see that nearly four out of five students found this requirement a very helpful or helpful experience.

The survey also asked students to provide comments about their experiences and to provide suggestions for ways things could be improved. The following quotes represent both the negative and positive responses of the students who worked with writing fellows; however, the positive comments outnumbered the negative by at least four to one.

These anecdotal remarks provide a valuable barometer of the impact of the Writing Fellows program. Students often remark about the importance of the personal contact and sincere concern the Writing Fellows bring to the educational experience at Monroe County Community College. It is quite obvious that the medium and message are closely united in this program.

POSITIVE COMMENTS (A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF RESPONSES):

"She was a great help and also very understanding when I mixed up my appointment days."

"He was very friendly to work with."

"He was obviously concerned and capable and quite professional. He was also resourceful. We had to do our second consultation in the parking lot because the library was closed Friday evening. We did so with no problem."

"Her comments helped me end up with an A on the paper."

"Very effective. Keep it up."

"I was very pleased to find at MCCC the individual attention given to the students. The expectations are high, and the Writing Fellows allow the students to improve. The professor presents the program in a positive manner which allows the students to appreciate the program."

"She has a very positive attitude. If she did not know something, she would find out."

"Keep the program going. It's great!"

"I heard a lot of good things from the other students."

"She really helped me know what kind of errors I was making."

"This program is an excellent idea and very helpful."

"My writing fellow wrote almost a page of comments to me. They were very helpful."

"They spent a lot of time to make my paper better, and I appreciate that."

"I'm sure my grade was boosted by their comments."

"Please thank her for me."

"The conferences were even more helpful than the written comments."

"I think writing is important and should be reinforced."

"Please keep the Writing Fellows available in the future."

"The program is very worthwhile."

"She helped me to look at my paper in a different light."

"I feel the Writing Fellows Program is truly an asset to the college. Many students need assistance in writing, and this will be helpful to them. I thank my writing fellow for her time and effort on my behalf."

"She helped me fit my paper to the instructor's specifications."

"She did a wonderful job."

"It helps to get an unbiased opinion of one's work before the professor sees it. This way the writer has a chance to correct any big mistakes."

"I need a lot of help with English. I am very glad this program was developed."

"It boosted my confidence to have someone, not a teacher, tell me my work is good."

"The writing fellow went out of his way and was very concerned with my work."

"Despite the red tape of this program, the writing fellowship program is necessary for this school to adequately provide writing support to its students."

"I especially liked working with the writing fellow because I didn't feel intimidated by her. She is a student just like me--even though she is much better at writing than I am."

"I value her opinions. She always started the conversation with positive feedback, which one doesn't usually get."

"I like when classes require you to see the fellow because then I do it. I should do it for all my papers, but I don't until I know I have to."

"The conference was helpful in clarifying the written comments."

"Being a new student and out of high school for a long time, it helped me considerably."

"It was helpful to know that I had somewhere to go to get help with questions and problems."

"Keep it up. It really helps us to write better papers."

"Feedback is super!"

"She did not make you feel intimidated."

"I thought they did a great job."

"She was easy to talk to--and good looking too!"

NEGATIVE COMMENTS (A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF RESPONSES):

"She should be tougher. She is worried about hurting your feelings."

"We need longer conference times, and a wider range of times available for conferences would be beneficial."

"Though I realize that even great writers can benefit from feedback, I dislike the idea that instructors make use of writing fellows mandatory."

"I would have liked to have more of my grammatical errors corrected."

"I think they should be the ones to really tear the paper apart before the student turns it in--that would help more."

"We need more time to revise our paper after meeting with the writing fellow."

"We need more Writing Fellows and more times to choose from."

"They should be more helpful with grammar and less concerned with content."

"The program is useful only to those who do not have adequate writing skills."

"The professor must stick with the original assignment without numerous revisions."

"You would probably have a better attitude and response if the program was voluntary, then students would not waist (sic) time in them."

"It would be better if there were more available times in the afternoon to work with the writing fellows."

"I feel that the papers are not being incorporated into the class but thrown in on top of the other required work."

"Some writing fellows were more suited than others."

"If I wanted to write papers, I would have taken the approiate (sic) classes such as English Comp."

"I think it is unfair to the writing fellows to be bothered with all the extra work from people who in many cases do not utilize them after receiving their comments."

"I was in 3 classes with writing across the curriculum and felt I was overwhelmed with the added work."

"There should be more places to go with just you and the writing fellow. There were some interruptions that could have been prevented if writing fellows and individuals had a private area."

"It took too long to get my papers back."

"Hire professionals not students."

"Have more instructors use this as a requirement in their courses."

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PART THREE: EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM BY FACULTY WHO USED WRITING FELLOWS

Fourteen of the fifteen faculty members who used the services of Writing Fellows during the Winter 1989 semester completed an end-of-the-semester evaluation survey.

The following is a composite of their responses.

1) Will you be willing to have Writing Fellows in a subsequent semester, if they are available?

Yes 13 No 1

2) Good things you have observed about the program.

"I saw the confidence level of the fellows rise and my students signed up readily."

"Awareness of writing and its importance."

"Positive approach the WFs used with my students. Better papers! An awareness or 'consciousness raising' of writing, and the fact that it can always be improved."

"It focuses on the need for careful writing."

"Increased writing (and therefore thinking) skills. Improved student attitude in the classroom. Another perspective for understanding course material. Increased active student participation in the class sessions. Improved instructor morale, and a general sense around the college that something rather special and good is happening."

"Students are learning to focus on the complexities of the writing process. They are learning not to be content with one draft. More real learning is taking place."

3) Bad things you have observed about the program.

"Too many people, students and faculty, are not as yet participating. More should."

"None."

"Difficulty of matching conference times to my students."

"Not enough students value it, understand it, or use it."

"It may set the rather poor students apart from the rest, but then it is the teacher's job to see if something can be done to make improvements for the less motivated."

"It is a lot of work for the coordinator."

"Many students did not want it, nor did it dramatically change the papers submitted."

4) What things would you do differently if you were to do this again?

"I want the WFs to see me about every paper I assigned, to give them background in a more formal way. I'd start with assignments right away."

"I would decrease the number of essays. Papers must be typed. I would return papers without a grade, credit, or comments if they do not meet the required form."

"I would set a grade for the rough draft of the paper."

"Have a one-page handout describing the program, name of the fellow, and where and when he is available."

"Make the draft paper mandatory, assign points for the draft. Emphasize this as a learning tool."

"I would be stern with the Fellow about my requirements."

"I will allow more than one week turn around time, next time I will allow for two weeks. I will spend more time discussing the various paper topics with the WFs."

"I will put even more emphasis upon the importance of the program, of the process in which we are involved, and of doing more writing in general."

5) Do you feel that the papers you received this semester were better than those submitted by comparable classes without a Writing Fellow?

YES 11 No 1 Not Sure 2

"I have assigned papers for fourteen years, and this is the best set of papers I have ever received. Fewer errors and the papers were more understandable."

"Yes for those who utilized the Writing Fellows, and no for those who did not meet with the WFs."

"Yes, the papers were organized better."

"They had fewer errors. They were also more coherent: some thought had gone into putting ideas together carefully and clearly."

"Yes. Students are following the MLA guidelines and paying more attention to form. The writing fellow has helped them to sort out and order their ideas. The WAC program emphasizes through behavior the importance of writing for its own sake and as a learning tool. I have to estimate that the average grade is up a letter. WE NEED SOME FELLOWS FOR THE SPRING SEMESTER."

6) Did working with papers this semester require more or less of your time than in courses without a Writing Fellow?

More 6 Less 4 About the same 4

"A little more, but it helped the students' grades and writing performance."

"Less. The final product was more easily graded."

"Less. I did not feel the need to edit as much, since the WF's had already worked with my students."

"More, since I read both the draft and the final."

"More, but having a better end product made the extra time worthwhile."

"Slightly more. However, I know the time was well spent, and I am certain the learning experience of the students is better. WAC takes more time in class (one must talk about the assignments and their connection to the student and the course) and out of class (after having gone through that process the papers must be carefully read). But, Who Cares? The idea is to help the students, and WAC is helping with writing skills in addition to increasing learning of course content. I am sold on the idea of WAC. I intend to find more and more ways of bring writing into all of my courses."

7) Did the involvement of the Writing Fellow change the ways in which you read or responded to papers?

"Because the writing fellow headed off fundamental composition problems, I was able to spend more of my time on the content, on the ideas. I like that."

"I became tougher on students who had been told about problems and failed to correct them. I find it helpful to have a second opinion."

"I had a better attitude as I read as a result of seeing work that did not insult the instruction."

"They were easier to read, but it did not change my response."

"I taught myself not to focus so much on 'lesser concerns,' although I still believe that both high level and low level often converge."

8) What influence, if any, did involvement in the program have on the kind of written assignments you gave this semester or will give in subsequent semesters?

"I gave two assignments rather than the previous one."

"I assigned two (three pages each) where I had assigned none in the past."

"None, but in the future I would consider giving more written assignments."

"I will lay down more ground rules early."

"I gave a rather ambitious reference paper assignment. I have not done this in the past."

"I think I will give longer assignments because with WFs to smooth out the wrinkles, the reading of longer papers will not be such a chore, and the students will be able to write more meaningful papers."

"I might assign more papers, and I will expect WFs to help students with the MLA format."

"Rarely have I required essay writing in this course. The two essays assigned this term were central to the goals of the course. I plan to make these a standard assignment. Regular daily writing will increase in all my classes as I find new ways to incorporate it."

9) General Comments by Faculty Using Writing Fellows:

"Students enjoyed it and learned a lot! I also learned from the experience."

"My Writing Fellow is marvelous. She anticipates me!"

"The best thing about it is the student/student interaction."

"Students criticizing students often do so with hesitation and trepidation. They should take the plunge and not be so tentative about it. They are too hesitant to be critical. They are well able to describe what is good about the paper."

"I need to have my handouts ready earlier. I wish more students would take advantage of our 'gift.'"

"I have observed this: The better the students, the more likely they are to use the services. It takes quite a lot of prodding to move students in the 'needs help' groups in the right direction. They have no sense of history, geography, basic math, and/or they cannot write a 'lick.'. . . There is no way to divorce the students' social life from their educational life. As teachers all we can do is push, pull, and provide students a chance for better cultural literacy and communication. The Writing Fellow program is an added and valuable tool in the process."

"I think it is one of the best programs for helping students that I have seen at any college."

"This experience has changed my approach to my classes, and now that I have a handle on it, I expect to use WAC techniques regularly. I think it is one of the best things to happen to a college in my teaching experience."

"It really makes me feel good to see the new emphasis on writing skills, to see the fellows working away so intensely with other students, and to see the LAL, which is such a dreary, empty place on many campuses, buzzing with productive activity. It is humming."

"We need more participation and support at all levels, particularly faculty support and administration support--the students will then follow."

"Let's get more publicity, more faculty, more students, more money, and make this place the college that writes."

PART FOUR: EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM BY THE WRITING FELLOWS

The Writing Fellows will probably benefit the most from this program. All twenty-five Writing Fellows completed a questionnaire at the end of the semester. All said it was a good experience, and, based on these evaluations, their experiences were remarkably similar.

Each Writing Fellow spent two hours a week in the Writing Center in the LAL. Nearly all were disappointed in the relatively small number of drop-in students they worked with in the Writing Center. This varied somewhat, depending of the times they were working in the Writing Center. All agreed we need to do more to advertise this service--to faculty and students alike.

On the other hand, the Writing Fellows were kept very busy with the papers they "fellowed" in the classes to which they were assigned.

(There were two exceptions--classes in which the faculty members recommended but did not require consultation with the Writing Fellow assigned to the class. Very few students in these two classes made use of the Writing Fellows' services.)

In all, the survey revealed that the first drafts of forty-nine papers in courses across the curriculum were "fellowed" this semester. Most classes had two short papers--between three and five pages. A few classes had one longer paper--up to ten pages. One class had six short papers--each a page or two.

Each Writing Fellow was asked to work with up to a maximum of twenty students in the class to which he or she was assigned--most had between ten and fifteen to work with.

When asked to estimate how many hours they spent working with papers in the classes to which they were assigned--reading and writing on them at home and in sessions with the writers, the answers varied. (This does not include time spent in the Writing Center working with students in other classes.) Most reported working well over sixty hours: "60-80 / 65 / 70/ 55 / 50 / somewhere between 50-100 hours / 47 1/2 / 80 / 60-70."

Several made comments similar to this: "I spent over an hour reading and commenting on each paper. In addition I spent about a half hour discussing the paper with each student."

When asked to comment on their relationship with the instructor of the class to which they were assigned, the Writing Fellows responded favorably:

very good	16
good	6
poor	3

Some of their comments were quite revealing:

"He was great--always ready to help and extremely supportive. He even sent me a letter thanking me."

"We had a friendly and cooperative relationship. He felt positive about the writing program and stressed the importance to the students. He was very considerate of me."

"He put me at ease by showing confidence in me."

"We worked well together. He has a reputation of being a 'hard' teacher, but he is willing to teach and help anyone who really wants to learn. I like that."

"He confided in me, and I felt like we were working together as a team to help the students."

"I saw him at least twice a week. He kept encouraging me, and making sure that his students were keeping their appointments."

When the Writing Fellows were asked to tell if they felt their own writing had improved as a result of their work this semester, all agreed that it had.

"Definitely. I used to spend hours agonizing over every word and paragraph in an assignment. I've learned to start quickly and write a rough draft. I then make revisions. I learned to relax and experiment with new ideas and forms of writing."

"I am more careful not to make the mistakes I saw in the papers I 'fellowed.'"

"I've become much more aware of organization and development."

"I learned a lot from the students with whom I worked. It was fun working with them."

"I have learned a great deal from my classmates and from the reading about generating ideas."

"I learned to value feedback."

"I have discovered that marvelous creation called a word processor. It has eased considerably the burden of creation."

"This class has been more beneficial to my studies than any previous English class."

"Yes. I realize I can write the introduction last. I do not have to write everything in the order in which it will appear."

"To me the major contribution this program has given is that I have learned to write less formally and stiff."

"Yes. Now I always have someone read my paper when I am finished. I start my papers sooner, and I do not try to make it perfect from the start."

"I feel much more relaxed about my writing."

"Most of all I have gained confidence."

A Brief History of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) at Monroe County Community College

A Chronology
by
Dr. John Holladay / WAC Coordinator

Winter Semester, 1986 : Audrey Warrick, our new Division Chair for Humanities and Social Sciences, and I discussed the growing emphasis on WAC in professional journals and at professional conferences. I suggested we might get a WAC spokesman to address our faculty, and she began to explore the possibility.

April 1986: Audrey Warrick asked me to form a WAC committee and explore its possible uses on our campus. I was already involved in several committees and teaching a full load, so I reluctantly declined her proposal.

After further investigation, in May of 1986 Audrey Warrick arranged a meeting which brought together representatives from each division on campus. About a dozen faculty members and administrators participated in a spirited discussion of student-writing at MCCC. A number of important issues were raised, and members from each division showed an interest in exploring the possibilities of a campus-wide approach to improving student writing.

This initial meeting was followed a few days later by a general faculty meeting. At that time the faculty responded to a questionnaire asking: "Where do we go from here with writing across the curriculum?" The overwhelming majority felt we should explore the issues further, and, although we reached no consensus on the approach to be taken, most faculty members said they would be interested in participating in such an effort.

However, since no one was given the responsibility of implementing this proposal, the issue lay dormant for six months.

Audrey was too busy. I was too busy. So, on October 24, 1986, I submitted a written proposal for an Institutional Project Grant to research WAC issues thoroughly: in the literature and first hand--on campus, in the state, and nationally. By the end of the winter term 1987 I was to present a written report which would include a proposal for the direction MCCC should take with WAC. The report would examine WAC programs at other colleges and determine which, if any, had worked best. The report would also examine which approaches had failed, and it would try to determine where they had gone wrong.

In other words, I was to discover if this was just another academic fad, or if WAC could have any long-term influence on curriculum and learning.

November 26, 1986: An ad hoc committee met to review the proposal. Tim Bennett served as chairman. The committee unanimously supported the proposal, and it was approved by MCCC President, Gerald Welch.

WINTER 1987:

During the next few months I read everything I could find about WAC. I attended conferences and workshops. I talked with faculty on our campus and on several other campuses.

I surveyed our faculty's use of writing and attitudes toward writing. This questionnaire was completed by 100% of our faculty. The majority indicated an interest in exploring WAC approaches. Nearly all felt their students had serious writing problems. When asked if they felt that a significant number of their students were seriously handicapped by deficient writing skills, 80% of the faculty replied that they felt this was true. The survey also revealed that most faculty members required very little writing of their students. (One way to avoid the problem of poor student-writing is to seldom using writing in non-writing classes.)

In addition to surveying our own faculty, I called every community college in Michigan and charted the progress they had made with writing across the curriculum--most had done nothing. Only two reported they were actively involved with interdisciplinary writing programs. Three had tried but were no longer actively involved with WAC.

January 30, 1987: Audrey Warrick and I attended the LAND (Liberal Arts Network for Development) conference in Lansing. We both took part in the conference's WAC session.

February 1987: I attended an all-day WAC conference at Henry Ford Community College.

March 1987, Atlanta: MCCC Professor Dave Moore and I attended several workshops related to WAC at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). I participated in a pre-conference all-day WAC workshop led by several of the leading authors on the subject.

During the CCCC convention, I also listened to an excellent summary of WAC strengths and weaknesses by Tori-Haring Smith of Brown University. She recommended the Writing Fellow approach, but I feared this would be hard to implement on a two-year campus. Writing Fellows would leave too soon after they were trained. (It took me another year to decide that I was wrong about this.)

On April 20, 1987, I presented my eighty-page report. It includes a twenty-five summary of the literature on WAC and a ten page survey of our own faculty's attitudes toward writing and their uses of writing in their classes. It provides several examples of WAC programs at other colleges in Michigan and across the country. It lists WAC involvement (or lack of involvement) at each of Michigan's twenty-nine community colleges. It proposes several options available to MCCC, and it includes recommendations for MCCC's approach to WAC. (This report is now available nationally through the ERIC Clearing House for Junior Colleges. The identification number is ED 298 995.)

September 8, 1987: I spoke to the entire staff at the annual luncheon before the start of the new school year. I distributed copies of the eighty-page WAC report to all MCCC faculty and explained our WAC plans for the 1987-88 school year. I also began to recruit a WAC advisory board.

During the fall 1987 term, the WAC Advisory Board was formed, and we scheduled a planning session to be led by an experienced WAC advisor and workshop leader: MSU Professor, Michael Steinberg.

WINTER 1988

January 15, 1988: The WAC Advisory Board (Boggs-Clothier, Dentner, DeVries, Fink, Harmon, Hileman, Kollin, Merkel, Rumler, and Holladay) met with MSU Professor Steinberg. He spoke for an hour and a half about WAC. He answered a lot of questions, and we set a date for a two-day WAC conference open to all MCCC faculty in May of 1988.

The WAC Advisory Board met again on January 29 and on February 15 to finalize a budget and a plan for the 1988-89 WAC activities.

February 1988: I led a WAC seminar at the Midwest Regional Conference for English in the Two-Year College, in Champaign, Illinois.

March 1988: Dave Moore and I attended the WAC workshops at the CCCC in St. Louis. I attended a half-day session on Writing Fellows and became convinced that this approach can work at a two-year college, so I returned and immediately drafted a revision to the WAC proposal I had made for the coming year. I submitted it to Bob Kollin, Dean of Instruction, on May 3, 1989, and he gave it strong support. After, I discussed the new WAC proposal in a meeting with President Welch, Dean Kollin, and Audrey Warrick, they gave the revised proposal their support. The only significant change from the original proposal would be to include funding for Writing Fellows and a Writing Center in the Learning Assistance Lab.

May 12 and 13, 1988: Mike Steinberg of MSU and I led a two-day WAC workshop for our faculty. It was off campus (St. Mary Conference Center), and it was optional. Thirty-two MCCC faculty and administrators attended the conference.

May 23, 1988: Dean Kollin sent me notice that the WAC plans for the 1988-89 school year had been approved by the administration and would be presented to the Board of Trustees for their approval at the June meeting. The budget included $1,000 mini-grants for faculty members willing to become involved in the program and work in the Writing Center; the WAC coordinator was to have two released classes in the fall and one released class in the winter; twenty-five Writing Fellowships were funded for the winter 1989 term.

FALL and WINTER 1988-89

Three important WAC activities began in the fall of 1988:

1) Six WAC Workshops were held in the fall and winter terms. These workshops dealt with a wide variety of WAC issues and provided practical advice about writing activities. Faculty members asked questions and carried on some lively discussions. Several faculty members presented suggestions related to things they found successful in their own teaching.

These sessions were led by the WAC Coordinator, Dr. Holladay, and they were attended by these faculty members: Hileman, Merkel, Leach, D. Kehrer, Roberti, Lemke, Dentner, Campbell, Leski, Brewer, Boggs-Clothier, Welch, McDonald, Metzger, Connor, Evangelinos, Harmon, Cox, Winicker, Sheppard, Masters, and Stanley.

Out of these workshops came a series of writing-policy statements which were submitted to all MCCC Faculty. Several faculty members have incorporated these writing-policy statements into their course requirements and handouts.

2) A WAC Newsletter began in the fall of 1988. During the 1988-89 academic year, we published five issues of Language for Learning. The newsletter kept the WAC issues before the faculty and gave them an opportunity to relate their experiences and express their concerns about WAC.

3) The first Writing Fellowships were awarded. Faculty submitted the names of over seventy-five excellent students. From this list (after a lot of preliminary screening, including interviews and writing samples), twenty-five students were enrolled in the 254 Advanced Composition class for the winter term.

During the winter 1989 term, each Writing Fellow worked two hours a week in the new Writing Center in the LAL, and each was assigned to tutor students writing papers in one class across the curriculum. All twenty-five Writing Fellows completed the class, and all who were not transferring to another school in the fall asked to continue as Writing Fellows during the fall 1989 term.

The complete list of courses and faculty using Writing Fellows in the winter term 1989 is on page five in issue four, volume one of our newsletter: Language for Learning (page 60 of the comprehensive edition of this report).

Winter 1989: Newspaper articles about WAC and the Writing Fellows appeared in the campus paper and in the Monroe Evening News.

March 1989: I attended several WAC sessions at the CCCC in Seattle. I discussed our progress with several of the workshop leaders from past conventions, and I distributed samples of our newsletter. From what I have been able to determine, we are one of the first community colleges to use Writing Fellows to improve writing across the curriculum.

June 1989: I mailed a questionnaire to all faculty (full-and part-time) asking if they would be interested in using a Writing Fellow in one of their classes next fall or winter (1989-90). The response was quite encouraging. Several faculty members who had not yet been involved with WAC at MCCC indicated their desire to become involved with WAC for the first time. Full-time and part-time faculty would like to use Writing Fellows in their classes during the coming year. We already have more requests than we will be able to supply. But this is a good problem to have. We will spread the Writing Fellows evenly among the divisions, and those faculty members who do not receive Writing Fellows this year will still be able to refer students with special needs to the Writing Center.

(TO BE CONTINUED . . . next year)

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